

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON S. 82, AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT ACT
JANUARY 20, 1999

- I am pleased to call to order the Commerce Committee's first hearing in the 106th Congress, on the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). In addition to welcoming Senator Cleland to the committee, I would like to welcome Senator Rockefeller as the new ranking member on the Aviation Subcommittee.
- Yesterday, Senators Hollings, Gorton, Rockefeller and I introduced S. 82, the Air Transportation Improvement Act, which is the subject of today's hearing. The Air Transportation Improvement Act is essentially the same bill that the Senate approved overwhelmingly last September. The only changes that have been made involve purely technical corrections and removal of provisions that have already been enacted into law.
- The legislation contains several provisions to enhance the safety, security, efficiency and competitiveness of the national aviation system. It would also establish a widely-endorsed system for reducing the noise and environmental consequences of commercial air tours of our national parks.
- As my colleagues will recall, the House of Representatives approved its own FAA reauthorization bill last year. Even so, the House refused to appoint conferees to resolve the differences between the House and Senate bills, and the legislation died at the end of the 105th Congress. In its place, Congress authorized a short-term, six-month extension of the AIP, which is set to expire on March 31, 1999.
- Although we have a short time frame within which to act on a substantive aviation bill, the likelihood of success is clearly within reach. The proposal before you was developed through thoughtful deliberations last year, and contains all of the same proposals that we worked on together to support.
- I realize that with new minority leadership at the Aviation Subcommittee, it is likely that revisions to or a substitute to the proposal may be considered at the committee markup. Notwithstanding this point, we are not starting from scratch. It should not take long to develop any refinements deemed important.
- Among the principal elements of the Air Transportation Improvement Act are

provisions intended to enhance price competition in the airline industry, and to bolster air service in communities that are not well served today. Many of the proposals in the bill were developed from initiatives that Senator Frist sponsored to improve air service options on behalf of his smaller communities in Tennessee. His efforts have been invaluable.

- For my part, I have focused on reforming the archaic, government-imposed flight limitations at the four slot controlled airports in the country, which have nothing to do with safety. According to the GAO, industry analysts, and new entrant airlines alike, lack of competition and anti-free market federal rules are part of the problem contributing to higher fares and lack of access for millions of Americans.
- We must renew our efforts to enact this important legislation. I hope that I can count on my committee colleagues' cooperation in moving quickly to approve the FAA reauthorization bill, so that we will be ready to go to conference with the House before the AIP expires.